

William S. (Skip) Church
Testimony in Support of Senate Bill #365
March 7, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is William Church and I am here in support of Senate Bill #365, AN ACT CONCERNING DUI CHILD ENDANGERMENT.

As many of you know, my son Dustin was killed by a drunk driver in 2004. For a parent, that is the worst possible thing that can happen. Since that time, my wife Colleen and I have worked to keep other families from having to suffer as we have. Colleen is now the National President of Mothers Against Drunk Driving and is on her way to Georgia to testify before their Judiciary Committee.

I'd like to begin today by thanking you for what you've already accomplished concerning drunk driving. Five years ago, only a few hundred DUI offenders were using Ignition Interlock Devices in Connecticut. In 2012, a law that you passed, requiring repeat offenders to use IID's went into effect. Last year, a law you crafted required every offender to use an Ignition Interlock Device.

The results of your efforts are staggering. In statistics released just last month, Ignition Interlock Devices in Connecticut have stopped 157,713 drivers who have been drinking from starting their cars. That's 144 times every day since 2012 that your laws have kept a driver who's been drinking off the road. In the same time period, you've kept more than 21,000 drunk drivers off the road. I can't tell you how many lives you've save or how many people you've kept from being injured or the amount of money that didn't have to be spent to clean up the mess left behind by drunk drivers. But know that what you've done has made a real difference.

That's what Senate Bill #365 will do... make a difference. When a person chooses to drink, and chooses drive and chooses to put a child in the car with them, it's a form a child abuse. That little boy or girl doesn't have a choice and often pays a price.

In Glastonbury a few weeks ago, a woman was driving drunk, ran a stop sign and crashed into a utility pole, injuring 3 children in the car.

In Southbury a few months ago, a man driving drunk with 3 children in the car crashed into a police cruiser and injured Southbury's Drunk Driving Officer.

You have received a packet with dozens of stories like these that took place right here in Connecticut. What Senate Bill 365 does is create an enhanced penalty for an enhanced crime but still gives the offender the opportunity to go through the Alcohol Education Program and avoid a conviction. It also places it within 14-227a, Connecticut's Drunk Driving Statute.

This is important because of what currently happens in most cases of this form of child abuse. A law enforcement officer will charge the offender with a DUI violation and Risk of Injury to a Minor, which is a class C felony carrying up to 10 years in prison. In the plea bargain process, the Risk of Injury charge is removed most of the time, leaving only the DUI charge remaining and not addressing the child endangerment component.

Senate Bill 365 appropriately addresses DUI child endangerment. It eliminates the stigma of a Risk of Injury charge. It still allows the offender to apply for the Alcohol Education Program. But it makes very clear that when you drink and drive and put a child in danger, there is a higher price to pay. For these reasons, I'm asking that you support Senate Bill 365.